

# COUNTY NEWS



PUBLISHED FOR EMPLOYEES OF THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

November 2007

## Not Lonely at the Top of OES



During the fires, Lane briefed Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Board of Supervisors Chairman Ron Roberts.

It is day two of Firestorm 2007. Ron Lane, Director of the County Office of Emergency Services, is in charge of the Emergency Operations Center, where leaders are gathering to make decisions that will impact thousands of lives. Lane is shouldering an immense responsibility, but gives no outward indication of stress or strain.

Fast forward several days, countless hours on the clock and barely any shut eye. Lane is troubled that strong winds have grounded nearly all of the available firefighting aircraft. He says he is reminded of the 1970 movie "Patton", when General George Patton, played by George C. Scott, faces a similar situation in his battle with the Germans. Patton calls for a Chaplain to "...see if you can't get God working with us on this thing." The General is certain, because of his intimate relations with the Almighty, that if the Chaplain pens a good prayer, there will be good weather. In the middle of Firestorm 2007, that is precisely what everyone needed; a good weather prayer to still the Santa Ana winds.

The winds have calmed, the flames now extinguished, leaving those around him to recall Lane's demeanor throughout the whole ordeal and wonder how he acquired such nerves of steel. Some clues can be found through Lane's service in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, during which he provided leadership to Army Emergency Operations Centers in Germa-

ny and Kuwait. In fact, while San Diego was battling the Cedar Fires, Lane was overseas, serving as an Operations Officer. Viewed from the perspective of his personal history, managing the County's Emergency Operations Center during the fires was not an impossible task.

According to Lane, quality preparation and old-fashioned teamwork were evident during the County's response to the fires. "When lives are lost and homes are destroyed, it's difficult to describe any portion of a disaster as a 'success,'" he says in retrospect. "However, by all accounts, there were many things during the fires that went right, a lot of correct responses. Many homes and lives were saved by the hard work of committed County employees. Both in preparation and response, the fires showcased the strong sense of teamwork and pride among County staff."



## County Television Network Covers Fires Firsthand

Suzanne Owen watched local news coverage of the Witch Fire all night after it first broke out, knowing her home in Sabre Springs could be in danger. When word came to evacuate, she packed her car with the necessities – some clothes, water, food and her video camera. Then she went to work, covering the disaster for County Television Network (CTN) as a Video Production Specialist.

Driving through a brown fog of smoke and ash, she navigated the back roads of her community to find the areas where the fire was burning. Having worked in television news for years before coming to CTN, she had covered fires before. But she knew this one was different.

"I was shooting flames in a canyon that were at least 100 feet away. I felt like I was a safe distance. When the wind kicked in, these flames jumped at least 50 feet closer to me within just a few seconds. When I saw that, I grabbed everything and ran," she said, wide-eyed with the memory.

Over the next few days, Owen would produce stories about the devastation in Rancho Bernardo, the 211 public information line, coordination of the disaster response at the County's Emergency Operations Center, and recovery services at a Local Assistance Center.

The stories are highlighted on "County Chronicles" and will air on CTN throughout November. Another show had already been produced for this month, but Program and Production Manager Mike Russo made the decision to put that episode on hold, focusing instead on telling the story of the fires through the eyes of County employees and volunteers and the services they provide in time of disaster.

"We're privileged because we have the access and the ability to do that, so that's cool," said Russo.

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## News Briefs News Briefs

### DEH Teams Partner with State and Feds to Begin Fire Debris Removal

The first phase of the County's Fire Cleanup Program, which will assist property owners in the unincorporated areas with removing fire debris, begins this week. The Board of Supervisors has approved \$7 million for the program to supplement \$23 million from the State Office of Emergency Services, and has already received the first \$5 million of the State's commitment.

County Department of Environmental Health staff from the Health Hazardous Incident Response Team (HIRT) and Hazardous Materials will collaborate with both California and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency teams to identify and remove household hazardous waste (HHW) from residential sites. Common HHW items include aerosol cans, batteries, paints and solvents, fertilizer, fluorescent lights and household cleaners.

Phase two, general debris removal, will begin later this month with a goal of removing all debris before the end of the year. Property owners will be mailed a Right of Entry (ROE) form and additional information about the County's Fire Cleanup Program. Those wishing to participate should complete the ROE and return it to the County as soon as possible. The ROE form grants the County and its contractors the right to enter property to inspect, sample, remove and clear fire-generated debris.

Property owners who want more information can call the program hotline at 1-877-308-8111. The County has also scheduled a series of workshops for property owners about the Fire Cleanup Program. The workshop schedule, ROE form, and Fire Cleanup Program information are all available online at [www.sdcountyrecovery.com](http://www.sdcountyrecovery.com).

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## In *Walt*'s Words

### As Flames Leapt At the County, We Rose to the Challenge

It occurred to me this past week that there are two ways that organizations deal with crisis. Some panic and collapse when faced with disaster. Others leap at the chance to meet the challenge. Not that there has ever been any doubt in my mind about our County's capabilities, but the performance of our County team during the recent wildfires leaves no doubt about what kind of an organization we are.

Simply put, this team has been brilliant! Literally thousands of County employees have been involved in some aspect of fire response and recovery. Considering the magnitude of the fires, the complexity of the response and the sensitivity of assisting victims in recovery, your performance has been of Herculean proportions.

Consider the excellence of our Emergency Operations Center team and the outstanding compliments they are receiving from media, from elected officials and from our community partners for their preparation and leadership. Think about the efforts of law enforcement, health and human services, animal control, public works (to name just a few), and individuals from just about every County department who have been heralded by those who were displaced by evacuation, many of whom we are now helping as they face the long road to recovery. How about our elected officials who stood tall in the face of crisis and calmed the fears of local residents? And most of all, take a moment to pat yourselves on the back for once again proving that San Diego County is the best there is at what we do.

We are a national model now! We have excelled at preparation, response and recovery in a major disaster, something few agencies can boast. Naturally, there are areas where we can improve and we will carefully scrutinize what we did right and what we can do better so that next time, (and let's hope it's a long way off!), we'll be even better prepared. And of course, we can expect to get the obligatory Monday morning quarter backing from those who've never actually been involved in a disaster response but who get paid to find something to be critical about. But I say, bring it on. I relish the chance to affirm the terrific job this team has done and continues to do to anyone who cares to listen!

In closing, I know I speak for all County employees in expressing my sympathy to those of our colleagues whose homes were damaged or lost in the fire. Our thoughts and our prayers go with you as you regroup and rebuild.

Keep up the great work!

*Walt*

Walt Ekard  
Chief Administrative Officer

***Mary Herron, an HHSA Administrative Analyst, recently lost her Jamul home to the Harris Fire. As her family begins the recovery process, she offers her personal reflections in hopes that other County employees will learn from her experience.***

I never in my wildest dreams thought that my home would be burned, because those types of disasters only happen to other people. I learned how wrong I was. My oldest son crossed the fire lines only to find a pile of rubble where the home he grew up in once stood. I asked him how some of our neighbors fared and he stated that he couldn't remember anything except what our house looked like.

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# Animal Services' Heroic Efforts Save 30 Burned Animals and Thousands of Others

As fires swept through San Diego County creating a path of destruction, animals were either being evacuated with their owners or were left to flee the flames.

As the incident unfolded, the County Department of Animal Services (DAS) sprang into action, saving over 30 burned animals as

well as thousands of others left behind in the fires. DAS evacuated and took custody of over 300 animals, including dogs, cats, exotic birds, pigs, pet mice, guinea pigs and geese. In some burn cases, euthanasia was the only humane option. Currently, Animal Services is still treating animals with major injuries.

Animal Control Officers went door-to-door with several pages of addresses of homeowners who had to leave their pets behind upon evacuation. Officers checked on these animals daily to make sure they had food and water and to ensure that the animals were out of harm's way.

"There were more animals than we had during the Cedar Fire and the interesting thing about it was that we didn't have a lot to do in the beginning. We were moving animals, but starting about Wednesday, October 24, we started identifying injured animals," said David Johnson, Animal Services Medical Operations Manager.

The most common injuries to animals were smoke inhalation, eye irritation, singed ears, and burns to the pads of their feet. One cat had hot tar on its feet from walking over a roof or from road blacktop that was heated up by the flames, said Johnson.



An animal burn victim is treated by Jessica Harvey, Registered Veterinary Technician.

Unfortunately, some animals were in much worse shape. Such was the case of a Labrador mix that was severely burned in the Witch Fire.

"The animal had second and third degree burns all over its body but this dog was just as sweet as could be," said Johnson.

The dog was found near Highway 78 in Ramona and has not yet been claimed by its owner. Even though he doesn't have a name, his spirit has made him well-known amongst staff.

"The dog was wagging his tail and licking everyone, even after everything it went through. It captured your attention and heart. This one was special. We were all inspired," Johnson said.

The dog was rushed to VCA Emergency Animal Hospital in Mission Valley. The County has contracts with several veterinarian hospitals for medical emergencies such as this, and local animal groups often help animals receive the best veterinary care for little or no cost to the County.

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## News Briefs News Briefs

### CECO Seeks Funds for Employee Fire Relief

The County Employees' Charitable Organization (CECO) has set up a County Employees 2007 Fire Relief Fund for County employees, both active and retired, who have been impacted by the recent wildfires.

Fundraising will take place from November 1st through 30th, and checks can be made payable to the County Employees 2007 Fire Relief Fund.

Please send checks to Vicki Rajskey at Mail Stop O-360 or Mavette Sadile at Mail Stop A-8. For more information, contact Diane Eldridge at (619) 515-6504 or Jennifer Uebbing at 858-694-3422 or visit [www.sdcountry.ca.gov/ceco/helpemployee.html](http://www.sdcountry.ca.gov/ceco/helpemployee.html) for more information.

### Retirement Symposium Is Rescheduled

The Treasurer-Tax Collector's Investment & Retirement Symposium has been rescheduled for Wednesday, January 9.

The event was originally scheduled on Wednesday, October 24 but was cancelled due to the recent wildfires. Its topic has been changed from the Deferred Compensation Program to analysis of 2008 market trends. The event will still take place at the 4-Points Sheraton Hotel at 8110 Aero Drive in San Diego from 6 to 9 p.m.

Open to all current and retired County employees, the event will feature two special guest speakers: George Chamberlin, Executive Editor of San Diego's daily business newspaper *The Daily Transcript* and host of KOGO's "Money in the Morning" radio program, and Alan Levenson, Chief Economist at T. Rowe Price.

The symposium costs \$15 per person or \$25 per couple, which includes dinner, free parking, and eligibility for giveaways and prizes. Pre-registration is required; please call the Deferred Compensation Department at (619) 531-5840 or Lyn Howarth at (619) 531-5454 for more information.

**Geoff Patnoe, Chief of Staff to Supervisor Dianne Jacob, lost his home in the 2003 Cedar Fire. Here, he offers advice and lessons learned to County employees who suffered the same tragedy in Firestorm 2007.**

As the ashes can attest, homes of County employees were not immune from the destructive path of last month's fires. To those personally affected, the road ahead may not look easy. But, I can tell you from experience that you will emerge from this far stronger for having endured your loss.

In the early morning hours of October 26, 2003, I received a call from the Office of Emergency Services warning of a fire in the 2nd District with many homes lost. Never before had I received a call like this; only six months earlier, I'd joined the County as Chief of Staff to Supervisor Dianne Jacob.

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## Behind the Press Releases: A Look Inside the Joint Information Center

As the wildfires began to spread across the County, the phones started to ring, requesting information about every detail of the disaster as it unfolded. First it was local broadcast and print media, then national media picked up the story. By Monday, calls were pouring in from around the world.

Whether it was a cell phone or land line, those working in the Joint Information Center (JIC) at the Office of Emergency Services had some sort of receiver stuck on one ear, eyes glued to large television screens on the wall that were tracking media coverage and fingers never leaving the keyboard, typing out the latest news release.

"There are a lot of things going on and multiple things to keep track of. Most of all, I was impressed watching everyone work with such dedication on such little sleep," said Tom Christensen, a Media and Public Relations Specialist in Health and Human Services who was called on to help staff the JIC around the clock during the disaster.

In all, the JIC sent out more than 200 countywide fire updates with information about everything from evacuations, shelters and boil water orders to local assistance centers, road closures and cleanup tips.

Once a release went out, the next wave of calls would come in with requests for additional information, clarification or live and taped in-

terviews. Bill Polick, Public Affairs Officer for the Department of Public Works, was often the voice on the other end of the line. He provided live interviews to local radio and TV stations several times an hour on the overnight shift, estimating that he did more than 100 interviews in the first three days of the fires.

"It was hard work, but the amount of co-operation we got from everyone at the EOC was fantastic. I could go to anybody and say, 'I need this, I need that for a live interview in a few minutes,' and I could get it," said Polick.

The JIC is in a room sandwiched between the Emergency Operations Center, which is staffed with local safety and emergency response representatives, and the Policy room, a meeting space for County officials and executives. Its location provided instant access to information needed at a moment's notice.

That information was then provided to the dozens and dozens of news organizations that requested it, including CNN, the "Today" show, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, "Ellen", Associated Press and Al Jazeera, as well as British, Australian, French and Brazilian media.

The efficient flow of information gave the County an opportunity to ensure that the public received the most accurate knowledge possible, while highlighting its preparedness and dedication in the face of disaster.



Employees staffing the Joint Information Center organized news conferences that drew multiple media outlets and throngs of reporters.

## Sheriff's Dispatchers Provide Serious Support

Sheriff's Department Emergency Services Dispatcher Melissa Hernandez wasn't anywhere near the wildfires, but she had to provide critical details about what was taking place in the middle of disaster areas to 911 callers desperate for information.

"Everyone was calling asking for the best evacuation route," Hernandez said.

The 12-year veteran reported to the Sheriff's Department Operations Center (DOC) the Monday after the fires broke out. She coordinated logistical information for the dispatch operators receiving calls from residents, who wanted to know which way the fires were headed, if they should evacuate, what route they should take and what shelter to go to.

Amazingly, there was one type of call that didn't seem to come into the center very often – people calling because they were in imminent danger of the fires.

"I heard a couple of dispatch operators say, 'If you can see fire, you need to leave,' but I think most people got the reverse 911 calls or left on their own," Hernandez said.

Fellow dispatcher Mindi Muskopf agreed, crediting the changes made since the Cedar Fire for keeping things calmer and running smoothly in the DOC. But she said there was one radio call that stopped her in her tracks – a helicopter that had gone down the same day President Bush was taking a helicopter tour of the fire damage.

"I heard a helicopter had just gone down. My heart skipped a beat because I knew the President was in San Diego at the exact same time. I thought, 'Oh, my gosh!'"

It turned out to be a helicopter contracted by SDG&E, and no one was seriously injured.

Beyond that moment, Muskopf said the biggest challenge was dealing with calls from evacuees who were angry or upset because they wanted to go back to their neighborhoods.

Muskopf said, "People forget we live in San Diego, and it's happening to us, too."

Working the same 12 hour shift with fellow employees for the first nine days of the disaster allowed the staff to lean on each other when things got difficult. And while both Muskopf and Hernandez are proud of how their staff responded, they say there are always lessons to be learned.

"It went much smoother this time. If it happens again, we'll look at the things we can learn from the Cedar Fire and this one and get even better," said Muskopf.

### Board of Supervisors

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County News is published for the 17,000 employees of the County of San Diego. The newsletter is available online at [www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dmpr](http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dmpr) (click on "Employee Newsletter") or via the County's Intranet at CWW. This information is available upon request in alternative formats for persons with disabilities.

### To contact County News:

Nicole Ossola, Editor  
Phone: (619) 595-4645  
Fax: (619) 557-4027  
Mail: 1600 Pacific Highway, Rm 208  
San Diego, CA 92101 (MS A-359)  
E-mail: [CountyNews@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:CountyNews@sdcounty.ca.gov)

Volume 29, No. 11 - November 2007

## CTN Covers Fires Firsthand

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With a staff of seven photographers and one engineer, the crew worked tirelessly to have the stories ready to air in just nine days. CTN staff also provided live coverage of each County news conference at the Office of Emergency Services throughout the fires.

In addition to the stories Owen produced for CTN, she used her camera to produce one more fire-related video, but this one was personal. She recorded the charred remains of a friend's home in Ramona for insurance purposes, and then helped sift through the rubble. That was the time when the devastation finally hit home.

"It makes it real, when you know the person. We spent Christmas dinner there, and now it's nothing, just like the homes I shot in Rancho Bernardo," said Owen.

To watch "County Chronicles" online, visit [www.ctn.org/chronicles.html](http://www.ctn.org/chronicles.html).

## Reflecting Upon Recent Loss:

### Mary Herron's Story

*Continued from Page 2*

After living in a house for 25 years, you can imagine how many treasures you have stored in various closets, drawers, displayed on walls and sitting tables.

How do you remember to take the children's trophies, medals, letterman's jackets, high school yearbooks, baby books with locks of hair and dates they performed certain events in their lives. I regret not taking heirlooms that belonged to my father-in-law and my grandmother. The list goes on and on. Everything is gone!

My husband and myself honestly believed we were not going to lose our house because on Monday my husband and my nephew went up to the house and the winds had changed direction. Even though homes in the area were burned, my house had been spared. We felt that we didn't need to take many things because we felt our house was safe and we were afraid we would break some of the antiques I had collected for the past 25 years. All these things are now a two-foot pile of rubble.

I would like to share this with all of my co-workers in San Diego and any one else who might find themselves being evacuated someday. Remember where you have stored the most precious treasures and take all you can. Insurance policies, deeds to the house, clothing, dishes, etc... can all be replaced. Take the things that are dear to you that can never be replaced: pictures, wrestling medals, football trophies, quilts made by your grandmother, special gifts your children made for you in first grade. These are just a small sampling of the things I wish I had taken.

Like most people devastated by the fires, I found myself seeking help at a Local Assistance Center. At the Cuyamaca College LAC, I dealt with so many of my fellow County employees and found them to be infinitely professional, kind, generous and

helpful. One positive from this whole experience is that it has made me so very proud to be an employee of the County of San Diego. At the same time, feeling such appreciation for my co-workers makes me want to reinforce my message, so that they will not experience the loss that I have: Never think that this wouldn't happen to you, because it can.

## Looking Back on 2003:

### Geoff Patnoe's Story

*Continued from Page 3*

When I left Tierrasanta that morning, I had no idea it would be the last time I would set foot in my house.

By noon, Tierrasanta was evacuated. By mid-afternoon I was told our home had fallen victim to the Cedar Fire.

Many asked how I got through those first few months. I jumped into work. I felt I could help constituents who lost homes by helping Supervisor Jacob and her staff understand the perspective of fire victims. I helped explain their uncertainty, anger and the obsessive drive to simply want to begin the process of rebuilding. In a strange way, having been a fire victim may have helped me better serve the County. It's one thing to say to someone, "I feel your pain." It's another thing to say, "I was burned by this fire too. How can I help?"

My path to recovery had ups and downs. The good news is the ups lasted much longer than any down. I'd be lying if I said I still don't think about what our home looked like on fire, what my office of books looked like in flames, or wondered about the noise the windows made when they exploded.

What advice could I give to victims still in shock, wondering what tomorrow might hold? It helped me to remember advice I got when I was learning to snow ski for the first time. I was stuck halfway down a run and the path ahead loomed too large for me to proceed willingly. It was suggested that I should just ski the snow in front of me instead of looking ahead at the entire mountain. The best way to begin your recovery is to ski the snow in front of you. Take one step at a time.

Four years ago, when facing mounds of paperwork, rebuilding hurdles or replacing lost treasures (thank you Ebay), I took one step at a time. Before I knew it I was back on my feet, looking ahead, not back. Seeing the bulldozers clear away debris was an important milestone. Watching the frame rise on our rebuild was another.

For victims of these fires, the path to personal recovery may also come in unanticipated ways. My wife gave birth to our first child shortly after midnight on October 25, 2005, exactly two years to the day of the start of the Cedar Fire.

Abigail's birth put things into perspective about the difference between loved ones and loved things. What we lost in 2003 was just material. It took me two years to realize that the fire could have been a lot worse.





**October 23, 2007**

## **Quick alert, mass evacuation may have saved lives**

Stinging from the painful lessons learned from wildfires that claimed 15 lives four years ago, authorities in San Diego County were quick to warn and evacuate residents this time.

The county's new, Internet-based emergency notification system issued a multi-tiered alert -- by phone, by e-mail and by text message.

The result: Some 300,000 people evacuated ahead of the flames.

"We do know that we have placed now over 270,000 calls ... evacuated over 300,000 people, which is a very significant number," County Supervisor Ron Roberts told reporters on Tuesday morning.



BY THE UNION-TRIBUNE

**October 26, 2007**

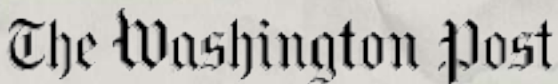
(editorial)

## **Strong leadership**

*Sanders, Roberts, others meet crisis test*

Sheriff Bill Kolender...helped keep information flowing and the evacuation going smoothly. And let's not forget Board of Supervisors Chairman Ron Roberts, who helped organize the multiple daily briefings on television that kept residents and evacuees vitally informed about what was happening and where it was happening, and Supervisor Dianne Jacob, who was characteristically tireless in defense of her East County district.

There was a remarkable amount of interagency cooperation and communication, and it's no stretch to say this kind of leadership helped save lives.



**October 25, 2007**

(editorial)

## **Not Another Katrina**

*Wildfire response shows why California is the gold standard.*

Because of well-organized disaster preparedness planning at the state and regional levels and drills that are continually performed, California is considered the gold standard of emergency response. After devastating fires in 2003, San Diego County invested in the automated reverse 911 system, which this week urged San Diego County residents to evacuate. And Californians have something that Louisianans, in particular those in New Orleans, didn't have when they needed it most: leadership, in this case from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and the San Diego mayor on down. That there have been just five fatalities in an inferno that has burned an area twice the size of New York City shows what can result from clear and coordinated leadership.



**November 4, 2007**

## **Officials: Money for fire improvements well spent**

San Diego County officials say they've spent \$117 million since the devastating 2003 Cedar and Paradise fires, including buying two firefighting helicopters and improving building codes, to protect the public from new fires.

Although the final verdicts won't be known until official reviews are conducted, last month's ravaging wildfires have provided an opportunity to see if some of those intended improvements helped keep county residents safer.

In general, the consensus among officials has been an unqualified yes. For example, the additional helicopters helped aid the aerial attack and the recently purchased Reverse 911 and high-speed telephone alert systems were given the lion's share of credit for helping evacuate more than a half-million people safely -- more than 10 times the number evacuated in the 2003 blazes.

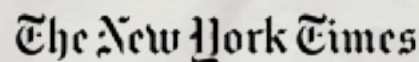


**October 25, 2007**

## **O.C., L.A. County lack a reverse-911 system**

The plan that helped San Diegans evacuate this week faces serious logistical obstacles in this area.

...Emergency preparedness authorities for that county and the city of San Diego, which launched its notification system last month, said their phone messages saved lives, a sentiment shared by some who received calls. Others said they appreciated that officials were making such a pronounced effort.



**October 24, 2007**

## **California Fires Out of Control as More Than 500,000 Flee**

...But the director of San Diego County's Office of Emergency Services, Ron Lane, said at a news conference Tuesday evening that he thought the corner had been turned and that more favorable weather forecast would allow firefighters to make real headway. "The worst is behind us," Mr. Lane said.

## Damage Assessment More Than Just a Day's Work

Only 24 hours into the massive wildfires that raged out of control in communities across the county, Department of Planning and Land Use damage assessment teams headed out to the front lines to answer the question many evacuees desperately wanted an answer to: "Did my home survive?"



*Damage assessment teams survey the remains of a charred home.*

James Pine was on one of the assessment teams, working up to 16 hours a day to document the damage caused by the Harris Fire in the southern part of the county. The addresses of destroyed and damaged homes in the unincorporated areas were then posted on the County's recovery Web site, providing people who evacuated with critical information. But Pine said his job involved more than just looking at fire damage.

"You spend a lot of time talking to the people. You're definitely an aid worker. You're not just a County worker. You're someone who can help them in any way you can to get them through this crisis."

Pine and other members of the damage assessment teams are certified by the California Office of Emergency Services. He has done similar work in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Inyo fire in the central Sierras and the Angel fire in the Julian area.

"Personally, it's definitely heart-breaking. It's terrible to see such loss. It does affect you," said Pine.

But Pine did uncover signs of life among the devastation. He and a co-worker found four abandoned kittens in a home that survived the fire. They gave the animals water and returned

the next day with cat food. The owners were eventually reunited with the kittens, who explained that they had not been able to find the cats when it was time to evacuate.

Assessment teams also look at the lessons that can be learned to prepare for the next fire. "Professionally it's a great opportunity to see why some structures burn, why some don't and what we can do better. To go out there and actually see it in action, there's no better learning experience," said Pine.

In all, it took the work of 27 assessment teams to reach all of the impacted fire areas, calculating that more than 1,050 residential, commercial and industrial buildings were destroyed by the fires – most of them homes.

Pine said he was impressed with the dedication of those in his department and workers throughout the County who helped during the disaster and are now working to help fire victims get their lives back together. He is happy to report a sure sign of the recovery process: the Department of Planning and Land Use is already issuing permits to those who want to rebuild.

## Students Return Safely to San Pasqual Academy

After being evacuated for two weeks to Green Oak Ranch in Vista, students and staff of San Pasqual Academy (SPA) have safely come home.

"Students and staff have returned to the campus and have resumed their everyday activities; they are grateful to be home," said Gia Alarie, Child Welfare Services Manager at SPA. "The core campus did not suffer major damage and that was great news."

While the main campus buildings did not sustain severe damage from the fire, 17 homes which housed SPA alumni, grandparents and staff were destroyed. An administration building, a trailer park, the HHSA social worker trailer, the pool building, and the avocado grove were also destroyed.

A new HHSA social worker trailer has been delivered to SPA and is being readied for staff's return. Campus buildings that were destroyed have been fenced and covered, pending removal. The campus clean-up is being coordinated by HHSA Facilities.

Local alternative housing has been located for the alumni, grandparents and staff who were displaced during the fire. The Academy hopes for a speedy restoration period that will bring the alumni, grandparents and staff back to the campus. "They are such an integral part of the Academy; they are what makes us a community," added Alarie.

San Pasqual Academy is the first residential education campus in the country to serve only foster youth. The Academy provides a stable, caring home, a quality education, and preparation for college, careers and independent living for 136 youth.





# In Their Own Words

Ver • ba • tim

DPLU Group Program Manager **Sandy Parks** found herself without a trailer for her two horses, Katie and Hank, when she learned of evacuation orders for their stable in Lakeside. Luckily, other horse owners came to her aid. Katie and Hank were housed in a makeshift stable for two days, while Parks and her daughter camped out next to them. When the fires encroached upon the shelter, Parks had her horses brought to her own backyard in San Diego.

*"They loved it there, and it was surreal to look out my picture window and see them grazing on my lawn and looking over the fence onto the street," says Parks. "It was a very scary experience...We are very thankful for the angels that trailered Hank and Katie for us, and for the kind people who let us camp on their property."*

When the fires threatened Ramona, HHSA Office Assistant **Eileen Mills** immediately thought of a family friend who lived there and had been having a difficult time getting around because his truck was broken. Mills' son picked up her friend and brought him back stay with her family in Poway. A nearby co-worker was able to pick up the friend and take him to his janitorial job every day at Poway High School. While working at the school, he was able to help firefighters who were using Poway High as a base. According to Mills,

*"They were happy to have a clean place to eat and also a clean shower."*

On Monday morning, the San Diego County Psychiatric Hospital (SDCPH) was contacted by Aurora Hospital staff in need of a safe place to evacuate some of the children in their behavioral health unit. Fortunately, according to Administrative Secretary **Margaret Jackson**, SDCPH had one separate, secure unit that was vacant due to early preparations for renovation. The Aurora patients and their attending staff were ushered to settle in as SDCPH employees provided lunches and cookies, arts and crafts supplies and freshly made beds for the kids.

After a two day stay, Aurora patients and staff made banners expressing their appreciation for the SDCPH support, which were proudly displayed in the reception area.

*"Being able to share our facility, learn about other facilities and their populations was invaluable. It gave us all an opportunity to provide some comfort and stability during a frightening and stressful time for the children and staff alike," said Jackson. "The spirit of cooperation was the most powerful tool we found to help us through this difficult situation."*

**Nancy Moyer**, a Deputy Probation Officer, and Human Resources Specialist **Nancy Schum** volunteered for 211 and offered the best support possible to residents who had been evacuated from their homes.

*"These poor people just wanted to go back home, and most of the time the evacuation order was still in place," said Moyer. "I informed them that the 211 was open 24 hours a day, and to call back in a few hours. Hopefully we would have better news for them then, and I always wished them good luck. The callers were so grateful...I was humbled, and glad to be a volunteer." Adds Schum, "It was clear that callers were relieved and thankful to have a human, rather than a machine, be on the other end of*

*their concerns. Having a real person respond to their needs and confusion helped to dispel some of the fear."*

Child Support Administrative Analyst **Tonie Hyde** was evacuated for five days with only the clothes on her back. Later that week, the family was joyful upon learning that their home and animals were safe.

*"The fires had gotten into our yard and burned a few things - things that can easily be replaced," she said. Barely back home, and estimated without power till mid-November, Hyde already hopes to lend others a helping hand. "Now it is our turn to give back...to help those that lost so much more."*

**Lorene Kellogg** lost her Julian home to the Cedar Fire in 2003, and watched with consternation as the Harris Fire approached her house in Jamul. Refusing to stand by helplessly, Kellogg reported to her job as a Housing Program Analyst with Housing & Community Development.



Probation PIO Derryl Acosta accompanies Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger while visiting the Rancho San Diego Local Assistance Center.

She was assigned to the Rancho San Diego Local Assistance Center (LAC).

*"It was surreal to be so close to my Jamul home while still under mandatory evacuation. At the LAC, I saw people in shock, including friends, who knew or suspected their homes were gone, but had no idea where to start to get their lives back to normal. I offered information and commiseration."*

When Kellogg was allowed to return home nearly a week later, she realized that *"If not for the concentrated effort of military helicopters, my house would probably not be standing undamaged."*

Even before Human Services Specialist **Velda Brown-Hogue** and her family were evacuated from their Rancho Bernardo home, HHSA colleague **Mary Darosa** was calling to inquire about the family's well-being. As the fires edged ever closer, Darosa invited Brown-Hogue's family to stay in her home as long as needed. They were welcomed by what Brown-Hogue could only describe as *"a feast"*

*Continued on Page 9*



# In Their Own Words

## Ver • ba • tim

for lunch. Truly touched by the generosity, Brown-Hogue said,

*"I truly appreciate Mary and her family for extending the warmth of their home to us...I would like to thank the Darosas from the bottom of my heart."*

After being evacuated for nearly a week from her home in Ramona, HHSA Senior Admissions Clerk **Victoria Bookhammer** was allowed to return home, but not to drink the water. Keeping her sense of humor after days of living at a non-pet-friendly relative's home with her ten cats and three dogs, Bookhammer exclaimed,

*"What a welcome sight in front of one of the wineries you pass going into town, a sign saying 'WELCOME HOME RAMONIANS!' and a smaller sign near it saying 'DON'T DRINK WATER—DRINK WINE!'"*

DHR Staff Development Coordinator **Virginia Exner's** new Ramona home was one of the Witch Fire's first casualties. In her words,

*"Fear and anxiety prevailed but there was also a sense of quiet acceptance." She did not have time to dwell on her loss, instead jumping into volunteer duties coordinating "Horse Camp Gillespie" with the help of Department of Public Works Airport Management staff and Animal Services Officer **Ken Winter**. The team helped nearly 300 animals (including pigs, llamas, goats and even a turkey), as well as their grateful owners, by maintaining a camping area for evacuees to be with their animals; feeding, watering and cleaning up after over 200 horses; reuniting animals with their rightful owners; and organizing veterinary visits twice daily. Proudly, Exner said that "The looks on the people's faces when they were united with their animals was reward for all of us, knowing that we had given them back some small piece of their lives and given them hope in the goodness of their fellow San Diegans."*

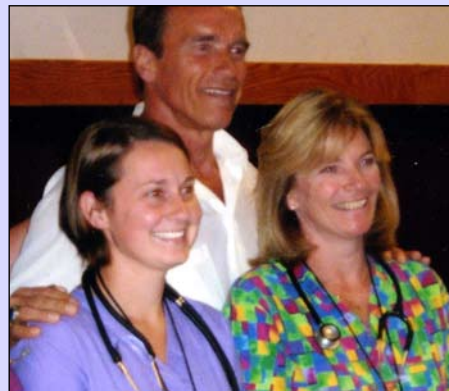
Just a day after being evacuated from her own home in Escondido, San Marcos Librarian **Sandy Coleman** began to consider how she and her evacuated friends and family could help others affected by the fires. After contacting the local evacuation site, El Camino High School, her group was told that help was needed entertaining children. Coleman and her friends, one of whom plays the guitar, went to the shelter with children's instruments, crayons and coloring books. They sang songs, colored, sculpted with play dough, played board games, and danced with the children and their parents. Fondly remembering the experience, Coleman said,

*"The sights of smiling children's faces along with those of their parents are the most striking memory of my experiences from this past week."*

HHSA staff from the El Cajon and Lemon Grove Family Resource Centers stepped into high gear to assist individuals and families who were evacuated or lost their homes in the recent fires.

According to Child Welfare Services Manager **Karen Martin**, the first day at the Rancho San Diego Local Assistance Center (LAC) was "pretty chaotic." She goes on to note that "the team

quickly recognized that what they were doing in the Disaster Food Stamp room was not working." So, managers **Charline Khoury** and **Donna Rafenstein** met with staff and discussed how they could streamline the process to determine eligibility quickly and accurately, with customers walking out of the LAC that same day.



East Region Public Health Nurses Meaghan McGraw and Joann Guilliani were thanked for their service by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

By the next day, East Region Eligibility Staff were meeting that outcome with near perfect accuracy. Since opening on October 25, staff interviewed over 600 applicants and issued benefits to more than 500 households. The average wait time decreased from more than five hours on the first day to an average wait time of just two hours.

*"Some of the applicants felt uncomfortable applying for disaster food stamps,"* said Martin. But staff responded with deep compassion, a sense of humor and a "can do" attitude as they tried to ensure that customers left with their basic need for food fulfilled. As for LAC staff, Rafenstein brought home cooked meals for them, and despite having been evacuated from her own home, Khoury ensured a steady candy supply for the team.

Many Public Health Nurses (PHNs) had good reason to be nervous for their own families when they got the call to come in to work on the first day of the fires. But when the call came, each was ready to respond.

Seven of HHSA's East Region PHNs had either been evacuated themselves or were on alert for possible evacuation. Nonetheless, they helped their colleagues throughout San Diego County, including at the Steele Canyon and Santana High School Shelters as well as the Local Assistance Center at Cuyamaca College and the Family Assistance Center in Dulzura.

PHN **Pam Besaw** had been evacuated from her Ramona home and was displaced along with her family for more than a week. In spite of not knowing at the time that her home would be saved, she worked tirelessly to assist other evacuees in the shelter. According to colleague **Martha Bartzen**, Besaw and others who "stepped up to the plate" were greatly appreciated, but their dedication was not out of the ordinary for the County's committed healthcare workers.

*"It's this kind of spirit that transcends throughout Public Health Nursing,"* said Bartzen. *"We have been trained to respond in time of disasters, to help and support others in spite of our own circumstances. That is what Public Health Nursing is all about."*

## Service Awards

### 35 Years

Bruce W. Chastain (Public Works)

### 30 Years

Carlos O. Armour (District Attorney)  
Deborah Bewall (Health & Human Services)  
Margaret A. Holcomb (Public Works)  
Marcia L. James (Health & Human Services)  
Maria Villavicencio (District Attorney)  
Grace E. Young (Health & Human Services)

### 25 Years

Soksann Edwards (Health & Human Services)  
Sandra L. Hendron (District Attorney)  
Mahmood I. Hossain (Air Pollution Control)  
Rachael Martinez (Sheriff)  
Sheila D. Matthews (Health & Human Services)

### 20 Years

Marianne L. Bickhaus (Parks & Recreation)  
Penny D. Bullock (Assessor/Recorder/County Clerk)  
Sylvia T. Carlon (Sheriff)  
Denise B. Cook (Health & Human Services)  
Monica Everett (Probation)

### 20 Years cont.

Sylvia R. Fernandez (Assessor/Recorder/County Clerk)  
Connie K. Gach (Health & Human Services)  
Julie Haley (County Counsel)  
Terence D. Jenkins (Health & Human Services)  
Catherine Johnson (Sheriff)  
Yosmia E. Johnson (Public Works)  
Monica L. Lehman (District Attorney)  
Theresa Ann Liget (Medical Examiner)  
Naomi Wooten Lizama (Public Works)  
April L. Mitchell (Probation)  
Michael Looper (Health & Human Services)  
Kevin M. Moehling (Sheriff)  
Gregory E. Novak (Environmental Health)  
Ester O'Connor (Health & Human Services)  
Valerie J. Palid (County Counsel)  
Amelita Rivera (Health & Human Services)  
John A. Rodgers (Public Works)  
Sherryl Y. Sanders (Health & Human Services)  
Carol J. Sax (Sheriff)  
Douglas A. Short (Sheriff)  
Barbara B. Shustek (Health & Human Services)  
Steven L. Spoelstra (Sheriff)  
Natalie N. Washington (Probation)

## Retirements

Vickie R. Bridges (Superior Court)  
Cathy M. Brown (Superior Court)  
Carol A. Colburn (Sheriff)  
Velma J. Cote (Medical Examiner)  
Nellie R. Fuentecilla (Superior Court)  
Carolyn L. Hamilton (Assessor/Recorder/County Clerk)  
Teresa M. Hammons (Superior Court)  
Diane G. Lindsay (Health & Human Services)

Roderick M. Macdonald (Sheriff)  
Kathryn P. Morgan (Superior Court)  
Edna O. Pascual (Health & Human Services)  
Luann L. Serbesku (Air Pollution Control)  
Clarissa K. Stanfill (Health & Human Services)  
Jody A. Thomas (Health & Human Services)  
Rizalina S. Villena (District Attorney)  
Jean L. Vukotich (Health & Human Services)

## In Memoriam

Mary L. Bailey (General Services, 1976)	8/07
Edward H. Butts (Transportation, 1978)	9/07
Donald Campbell (Air Pollution Control, 2002)	8/07
Joan Y. Goossens (General Services, 2005)	8/07
Gerald F. Hill (Health & Human Services, 1983)	9/07
Cecil L. Hinshaw (Transportation, 1980)	8/07
Lewis M. Hudson (Assessor, 1980)	8/07
George T. Kern (General Services, 1984)	9/07
Donald P. Kidner (Marshal, 1984)	8/07
Charlotte G. Palmer (Revenue & Recovery, 1989)	8/07
Robin W. Sanders (Assessor, 1996)	9/07
Nancy L. Sanderson (County Counsel, 1992)	9/07
Leanne M. Tenney (Public Works, 1986)	8/07
Andrew J. Tirpak (Health & Human Services, 1987)	8/07
Craig L. Walker (District Attorney, 2004)	9/07
Allan H. Wiggenhorn (Probation, 1992)	8/07
Jacqueline Zeidler (Probation, 1987)	8/07

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and friends of active County employee Trina M. Mescher, Health and Human Services Agency, (9/07)."



## Animal Services' Heroic Efforts

Continued from Page 3

Organizations such as Friends of the County Animal Shelters, local law enforcement agencies, the San Diego Humane Society, the Humane Society of the United States and the Southeast Area Animal Control Authority sent dozens of volunteers to assist DAS.

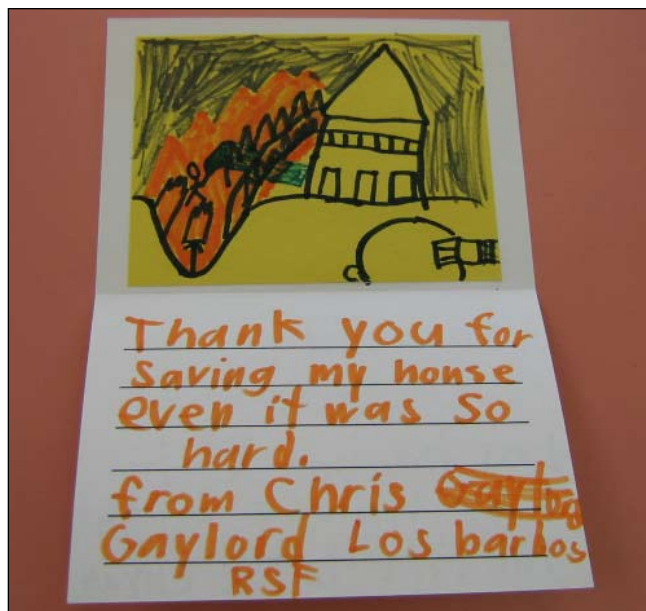
Animal evacuation sites included the Del Mar Fairgrounds, the Lakeside Rodeo, the Fashion Valley Mall parking lot, the North County Mall parking lot, Gillespie Field, Qualcomm Stadium and CJ's Ranch in Campo.

"While it was heart wrenching to see the devastation caused by these wildfires, it was gratifying to witness the community and County staff pull together to respond to this catastrophic event. I'm especially grateful for the extraordinary efforts of our staff and other first responders and the heroic efforts they used to rescue animals out of the path of the fires, and for the many generous offers of assistance we received from people across the nation," said Dawn Danielson, director of the Department of Animal Services.

As the ashes began to settle around the county, DAS said they were able to happily reunite at least one cat with its owner.

"We're still trying to reunite animals with their owners, but most of the animals we've received do not have tags or a microchip to identify them. After a disaster of this magnitude, when people have lost their homes and everything they have, they may be overwhelmed and just figure that they lost their animals as well, not realizing that they can come down and look at our shelters or online for their lost pet," said Johnson.

Anyone who would like to adopt or is looking for their lost pet can visit <http://www.sddac.com>.



Letter sent to the Rancho Santa Fe branch of the County Library.

## County Preparedness Pays Off

The County took numerous proactive steps in advance of the fires to protect residents. As Chief Administrative Officer Walt Ekard noted just last month in County News, "We don't have to wonder if disaster could happen here; we know it can." The foresight of County leadership worked to everyone's advantage beginning on the morning of October 21.

- The Board of Supervisors recently approved a comprehensive regional evacuation plan. The plan helped the Sheriff and others conduct an evacuation of about 515,000 people; the largest fire evacuation in U.S. history.
- Last year, the County mailed a Family Disaster Plan to every household. The Office of Emergency Services launched an extensive disaster preparedness public education campaign that included television, radio and billboard announcements.
- County residents received voluntary and mandatory evacuation notifications by phone through the Reverse 911 and AlertSanDiego systems. Residents are now able to register online at [www.alertsandiego.org](http://www.alertsandiego.org) to receive emergency notifications on their mobile phones.
- The County's partnership with 2-1-1 proved to be indispensable, allowing residents to speak with an operator about evacuations, shelters and other fire concerns.
- Hundreds of County employees received training earlier this year to serve as shelter workers and shelter managers during a disaster. Many of these employees were called to action during the fires.
- The County led the region in adopting "WebEOC", an emergency management software program that facilitates information sharing among County personnel, cities and partnering agencies.
- During the six months prior to the fires, the County conducted two full-scale disaster drills.
- The Office of Emergency Services hosted a Business Preparedness Summit in September. One month later, many of the participating businesses contributed supplies and support to the fire response effort.
- Emergency Medical Services worked with state Disaster Medical Assistance Teams and Ambulance Strike Teams to successfully evacuate two hospitals.



